Lovely Strange Dark
SHIRUBE NO MICHI
BY KONNO KITA
STORY 6
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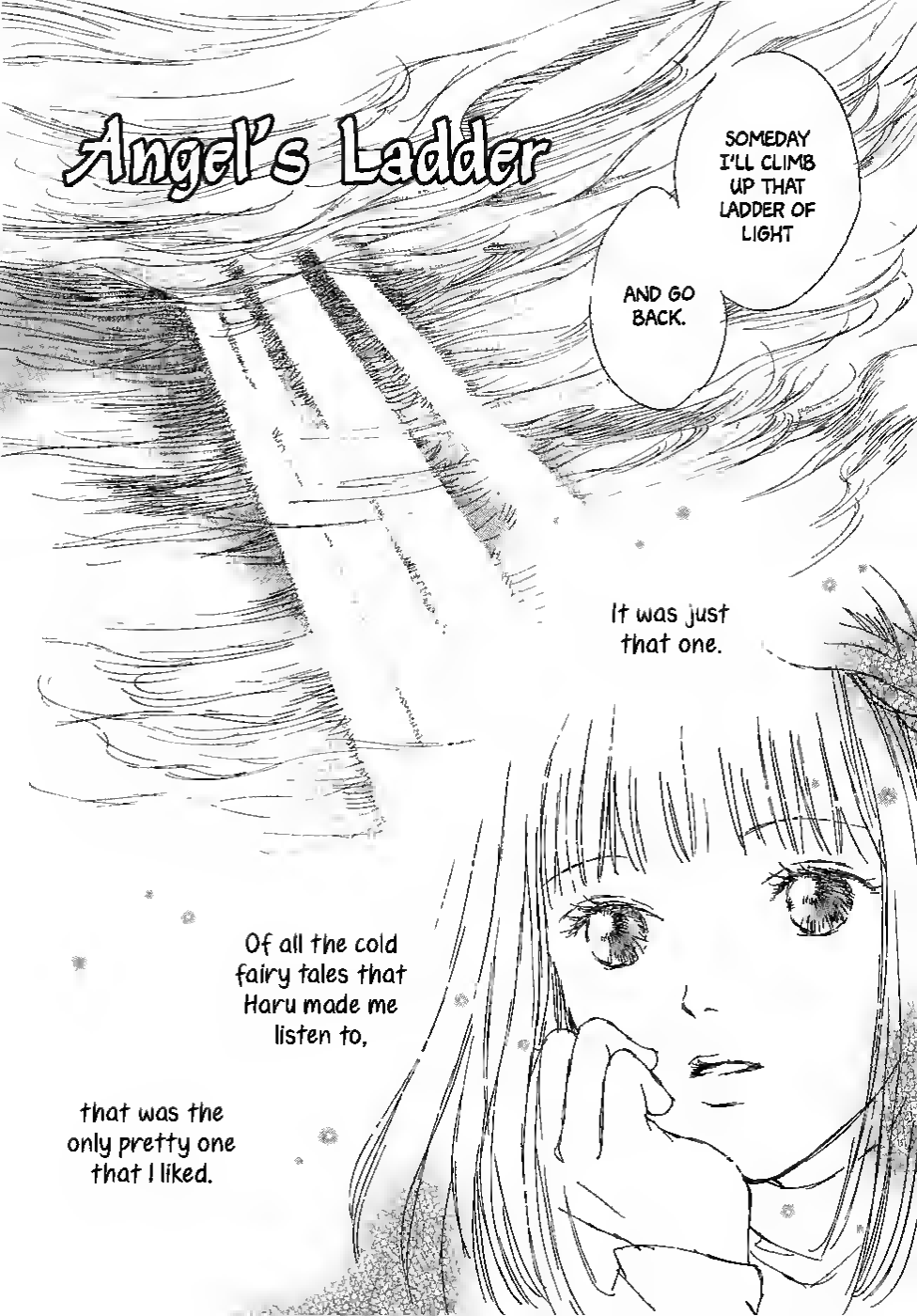
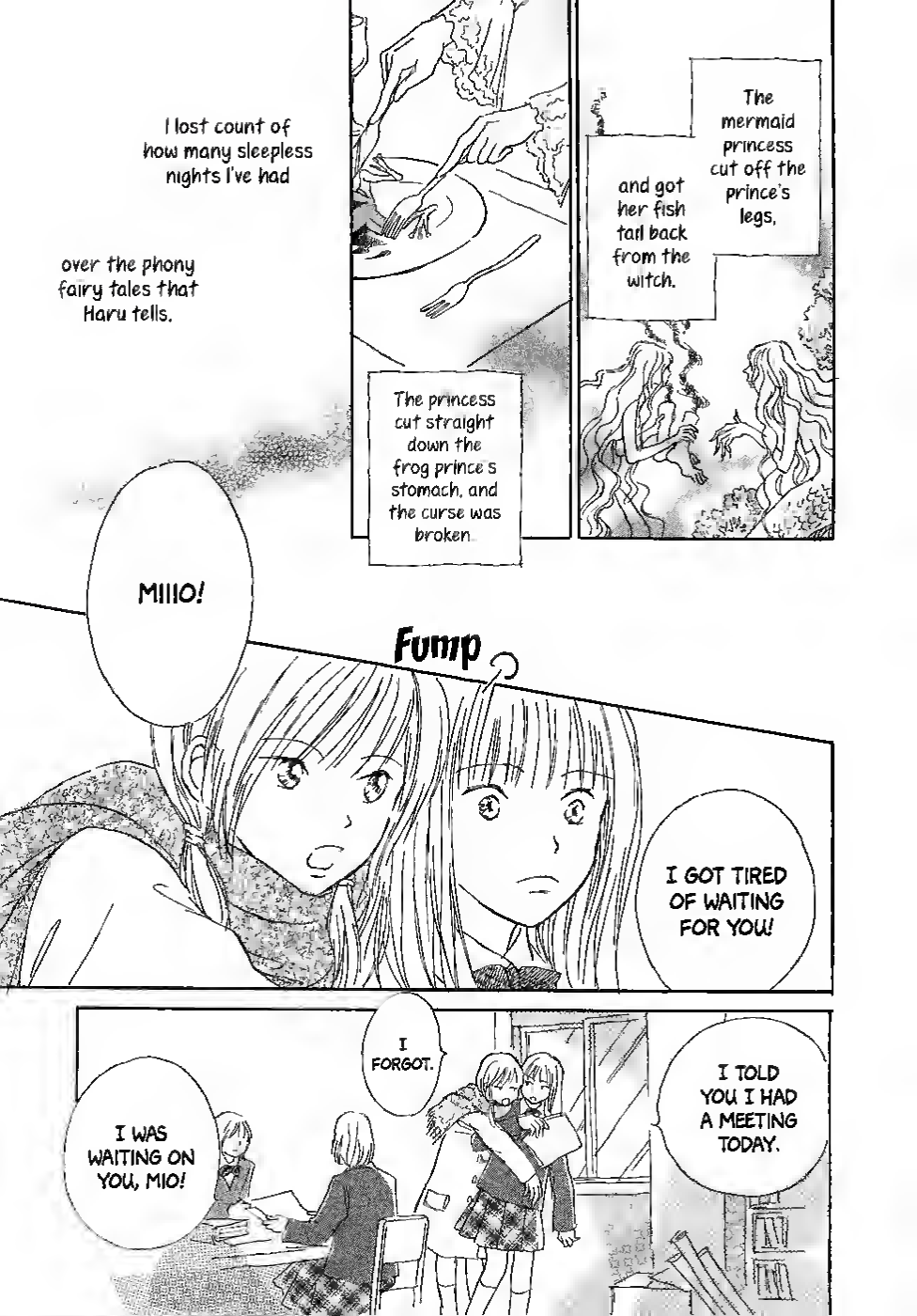
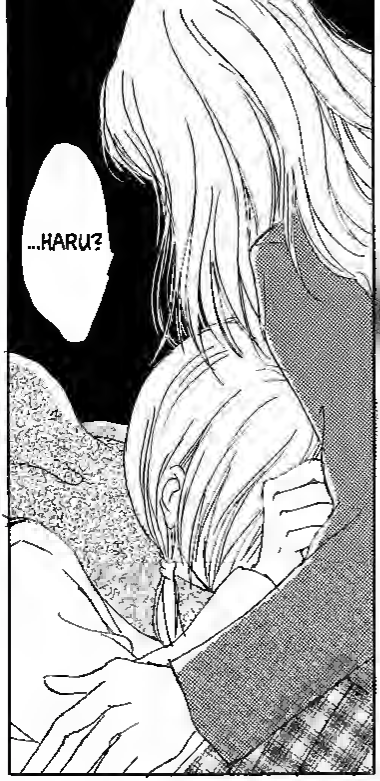
lovelystrangedark.wordpress.com

THE CLOUDS ARE SO LOW.
IT LOOKS LIKE IT COULD START SNOWING ANY MINUTE.
LOOK OVER THERE.
SEE?
THERE'S A LADDER COMING DOWN FROM THE SKY.
SOMEONE'S CLIMBING UP IT RIGHT NOW.
HMM.
MIO, YOU WERE TOO LITTLE TO REMEMBER,
BUT I ALSO CAME FROM THERE.
I'M SURE THAT LADDER WILL APPEAR IN FRONT OF ME AGAIN.


Angel's Ladder
SOMEDAY I'LL CLIMB UP THAT LADDER OF LIGHT
AND GO BACK.
It was just that one.
Of all the cold fairy tales that Haru made me listen to,
that was the only pretty one that I liked.


I lost count of how many sleepless nights I've had
over the phony fairy tales that Haru tells.
The princess cut straight down the frog prince's stomach, and the curse was broken.
and got her fish tail back from the witch.
The mermaid princess cut off the prince's legs,
MIIIO!
Fump
I GOT TIRED OF WAITING FOR YOU!
I WAS WAITING ON YOU, MIO!
I FORGOT.
I TOLD YOU I HAD A MEETING TODAY.

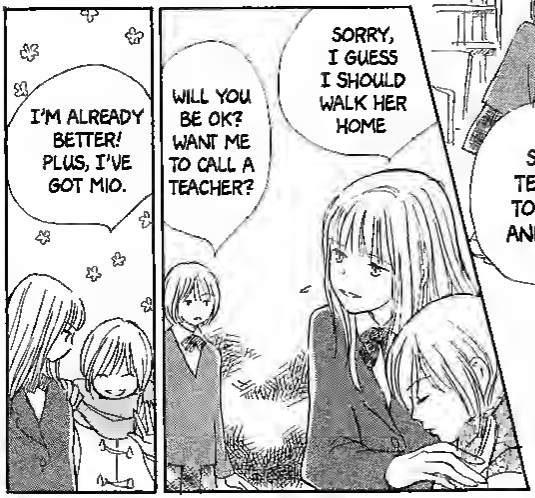

...HARU?

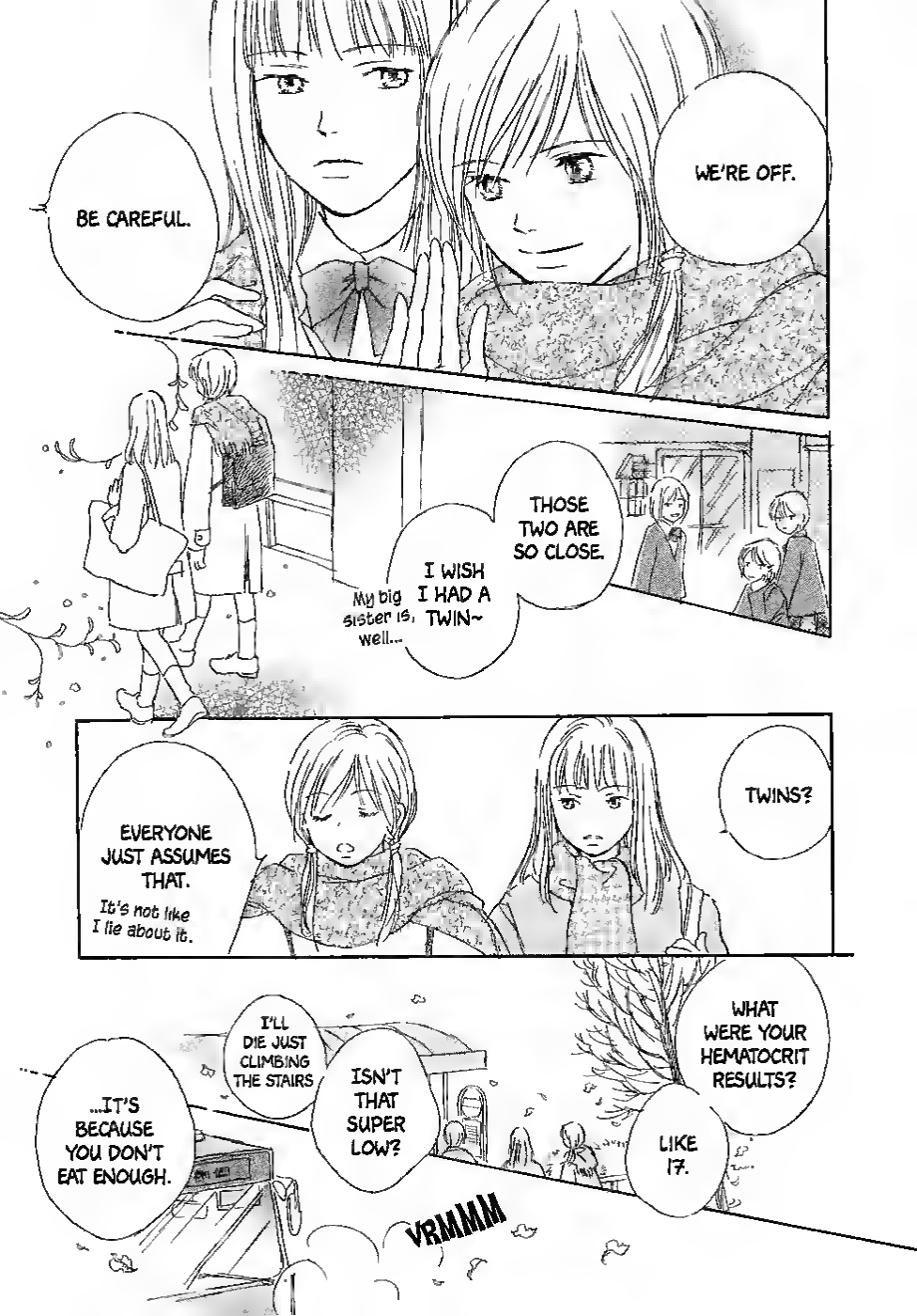
WE CAN HANDLE THE REST. YOU SHOULD HEAD HOME WITH HARU.
BUT ...

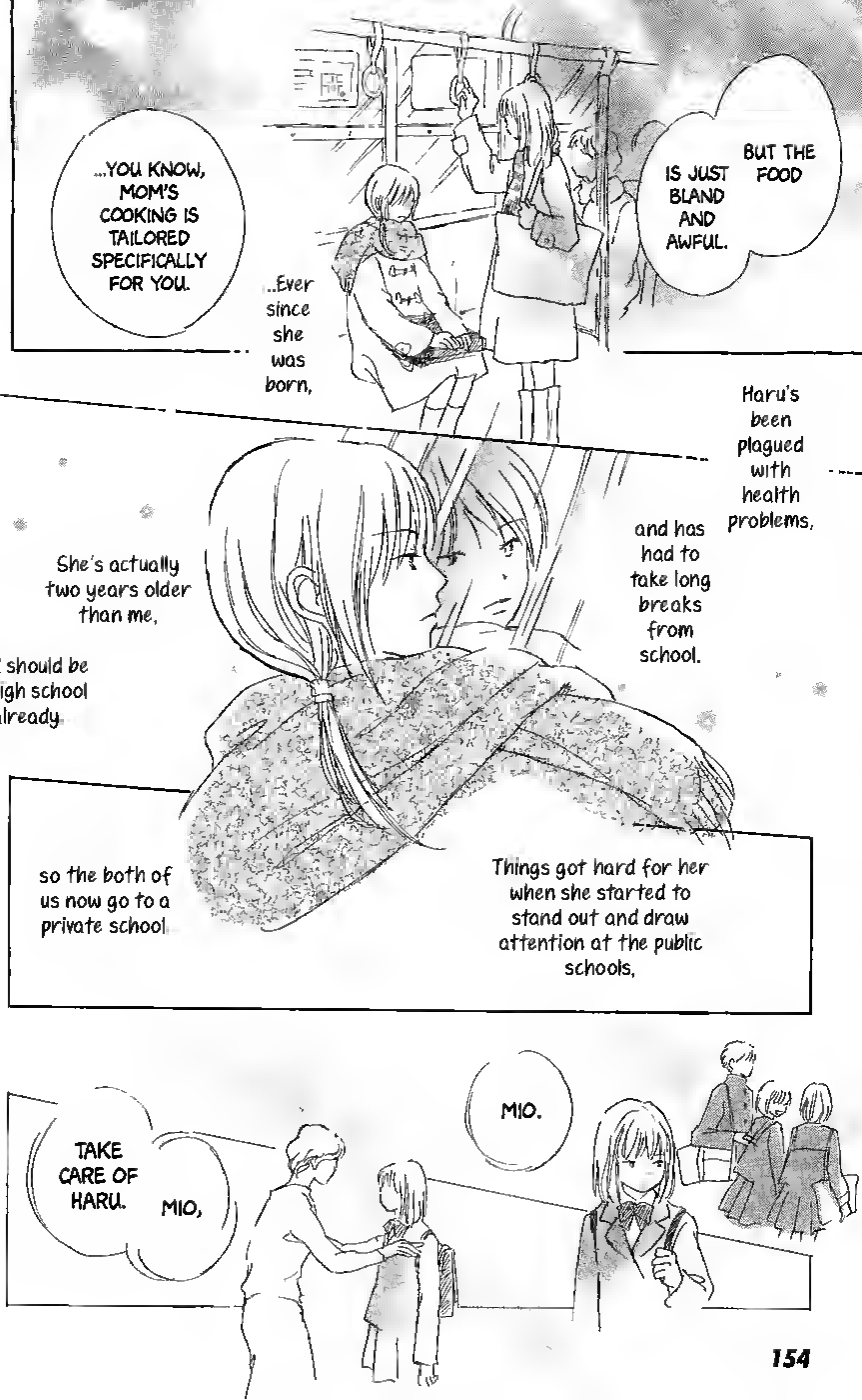
SLIDE

JUST GO ON HOME YOURSELF, HARU.

Hematocrit?
?
...I FEEL WEAK.
MY HEMATO-CRIT'S BEEN LOW LATELY.
SHE TENDS TO GET ANEMIC.

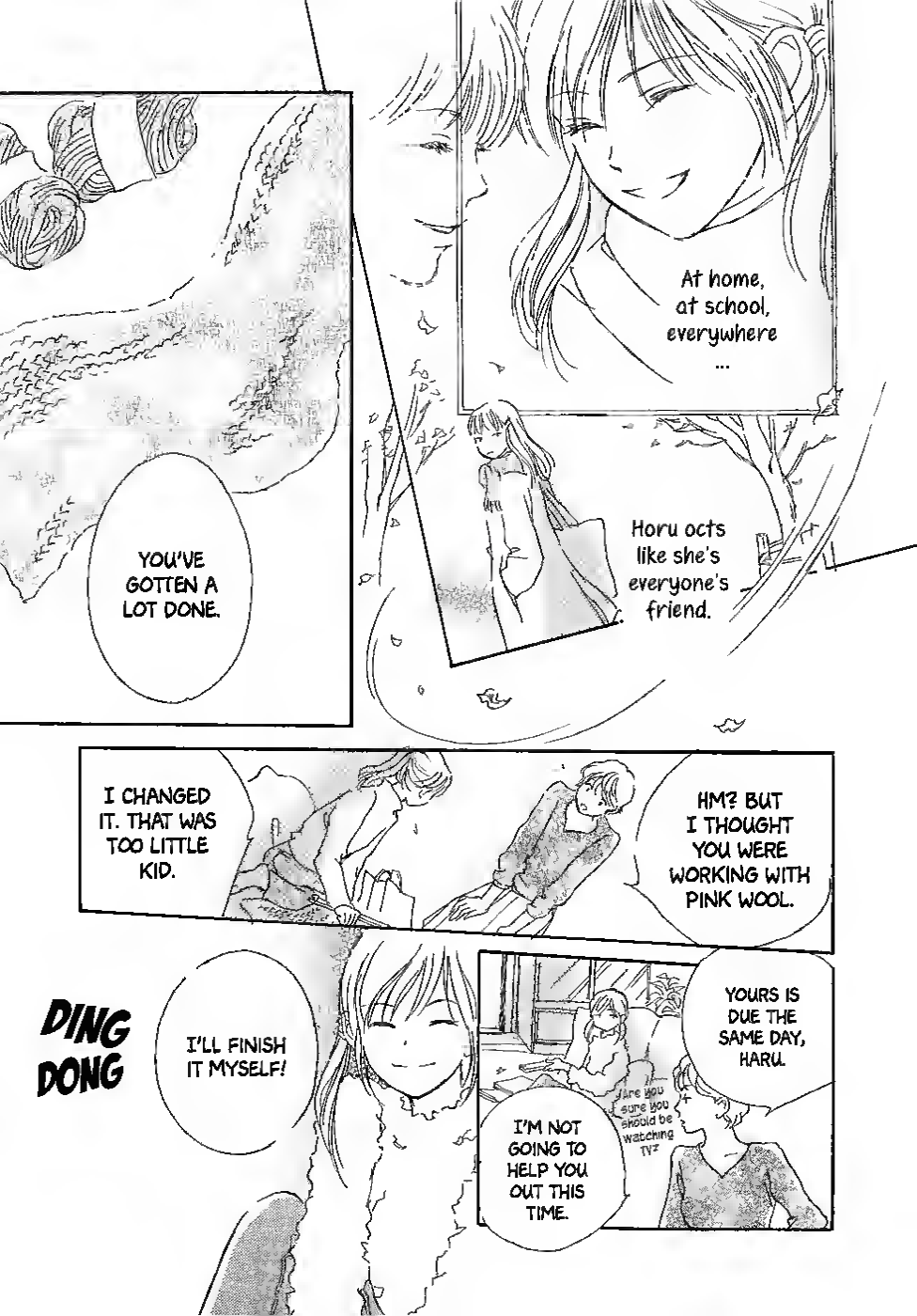

I'M ALREADY BETTER! PLUS, I'VE GOT MIO.
WILL YOU BE OK? WANT ME TO CALL A TEACHER?
SORRY, I GUESS I SHOULD WALK HER HOME


BE CAREFUL.
WE'RE OFF.
My big sister is, well...
I WISH I HAD A TWIN~
THOSE TWO ARE SO CLOSE.
EVERYONE JUST ASSUMES THAT.
It's not like I lie about it.
TWINS?
...IT'S BECAUSE YOU DON'T EAT ENOUGH.
I'LL DIE JUST CLIMBING THE STAIRS
ISN'T THAT SUPER LOW?
LIKE 17.
WHAT WERE YOUR HEMATOCRIT RESULTS?
VRMMM


...YOU KNOW, MOM'S COOKING IS TAILORED SPECIFICALLY FOR YOU.
BUT THE FOOD IS JUST BLAND AND AWFUL.
...Ever since she was born,
Haru's been plagued with health problems,
and has had to take long breaks from school.
She's actually two years older than me,
and should be in high school already.
so the both of us now go to a private school.
Things got hard for her when she started to stand out and draw attention at the public schools,
TAKE CARE OF HARU.
MIO,
MIO.

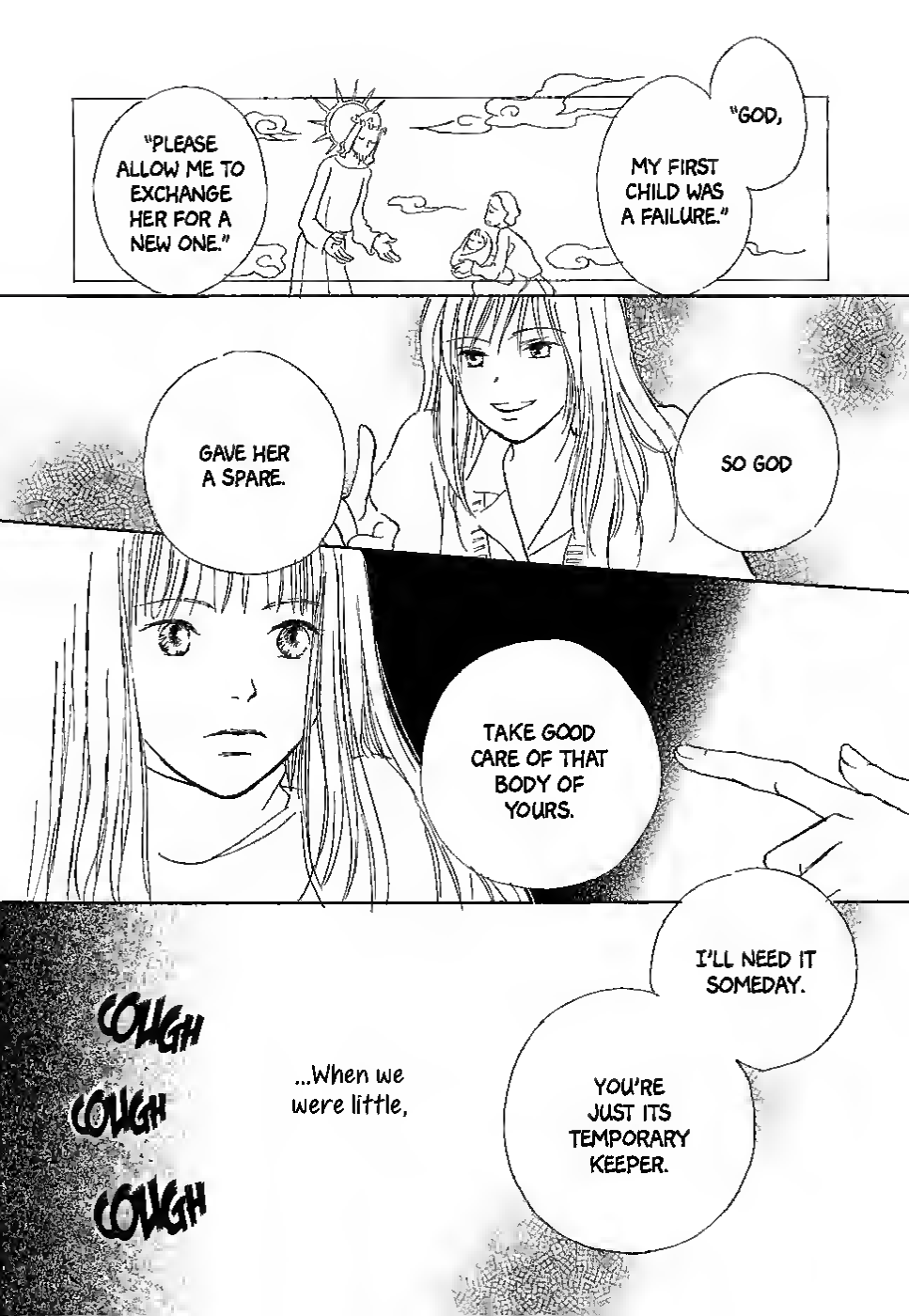
COUGH
COUGH
COUGH
COUGH
I've always,
always,
had ta a take a back seat ta Haru's needs.
Our mom
only has one kidney.
HAVE YOU BEEN WEARING YOUR MASK OUTDOORS?
YES.
COUGH
She's never once worn it.
LIAR.
HARU?
YOU MIGHT HAVE A COLD. THAT'S A BAD COUGH.
COUGH
COUGH
COUGH

the other.
Horu hos
becouse of oll the things people do for her.
She's oble to survive
Haru!
YOU CAN READ IT FIRST, HARU.
Lucky~
The new book!
LOOK HERE! IT WAS FINALLY MY TURN TO CHECK IT OUT!
Aha
Aha
HUSH, MIO.
NO WAY, YOU CAN'T LOAN OUT A LIBRARY BOOK~
Think
YOU SURE?
YOU'RE A FAST READER.
YEAH.


At home, at school, everywhere ...
Horu octs like she's everyone's friend.
YOU'VE GOTTEN A LOT DONE.
I CHANGED IT. THAT WAS TOO LITTLE KID.
HM? BUT I THOUGHT YOU WERE WORKING WITH PINK WOOL.
DING DONG
I'LL FINISH IT MYSELF!
YOURS IS DUE THE SAME DAY, HARU.
Are you sure you should be watching TV?
I'M NOT GOING TO HELP YOU OUT THIS TIME.

COMING!
Tap Tap Tap
OH HELLO, SHUN!
GRAB
HEY, SHUN. BEEN A WHILE.
YO.
YOU'RE LOOKING GOOD, HARU.
HERE, THIS IS FROM MY MOM.
MY, THANK YOU.
HOW IS YOUR SISTER DOING?
SAME AS ALWAYS.
Shove Shove
Did you grow again?
PUT THIS IN THE FRIDGE.
MIO, THANKS FOR COMING OUT THE OTHER DAY.
OH, SURE!

HMM ...
Take this.
And you brought your friends
IT'S GREAT WHEN PEOPLE SHOW UP TO CHEER AT OUR GAMES.
MPH
MPH
COUGH
COUGH
YOU KNOW, YOU KEEP CATCHING COLDS BECAUSE YOU DON'T WEAR A MASK.
COUGH
COUGH
COUGH
COUGH
COUGH
...MOM SAID
THAT RIGHT AFTER I WAS BORN, SHE RAISED ME UP TO THE SKY.


"GOD, MY FIRST CHILD WAS A FAILURE."
"PLEASE ALLOW ME TO EXCHANGE HER FOR A NEW ONE."
SO GOD GAVE HER A SPARE.
TAKE GOOD CARE OF THAT BODY OF YOURS.
YOU'RE JUST ITS TEMPORARY KEEPER.
I'LL NEED IT SOMEDAY.
...When we were little,
COUGH
COUGH
COUGH

Haru's words would bite at me
COUGH
COUGH
WHY DON'T YOU TAKE SOME MEDS AND GO TO SLEEP?
QUIT WITH THAT CRAP ALREADY.
COUGH
COUGH
MPH
MPH
like hail.
HARU?
TWSH
MPH
...In her left wrist,
SMIRK

Haru has a shunt used for dialysis.
If you touch it,
Mew
Mew
Mew
your fingers pick up the pulse
of her blood flowing through.
HE'S SO CUTE!
Mew
MIO, YOU TAKE A TURN.
No ani-Mals
NOPE.
YOU'VE NEVER HAD A PET?
Think about Haru
Feels like I have internal bleeding
YOU SUCK WITH CATS~
I DON'T KNOW HOW TO HOLD THEM.
You angry?
WHOA!
No way, is he growing!?
SCRATCH
SCRATCH

They're small and frail, and difficult to handle.
They kind of
remind me of Haru.
MIO.
Glance
Why'd you call me out here?
Whisper

Every naw and then
...THEN GO TO THE INFIRMARY.
I DON'T WANT TO.
BUT ...
NO WAY!
SO I DON'T HAVE ANY ON ME. ASK SOMEONE ELSE...
MINE JUST FINISHED,
that I have ta pratect
I get hit with a wave af feeling—
this weak and insubstantial girl.
as if Haru can sense thase feelings af mine,
HOW ARE YOU? DOES YOUR STOMACH HURT?
Infirmary
But,

she'll turn them around with a few quick words.
DON'T TELL THE OLD LADY ABOUT THIS.
HUH? BUT MOM WORRIES ABOUT YOU...
SHE'D TRY TO MAKE IT INTO SOME BIG DEAL, HAVE A PARTY.
WHAT A PAIN IN THE ASS.

It wasn't really early or late for a girl.

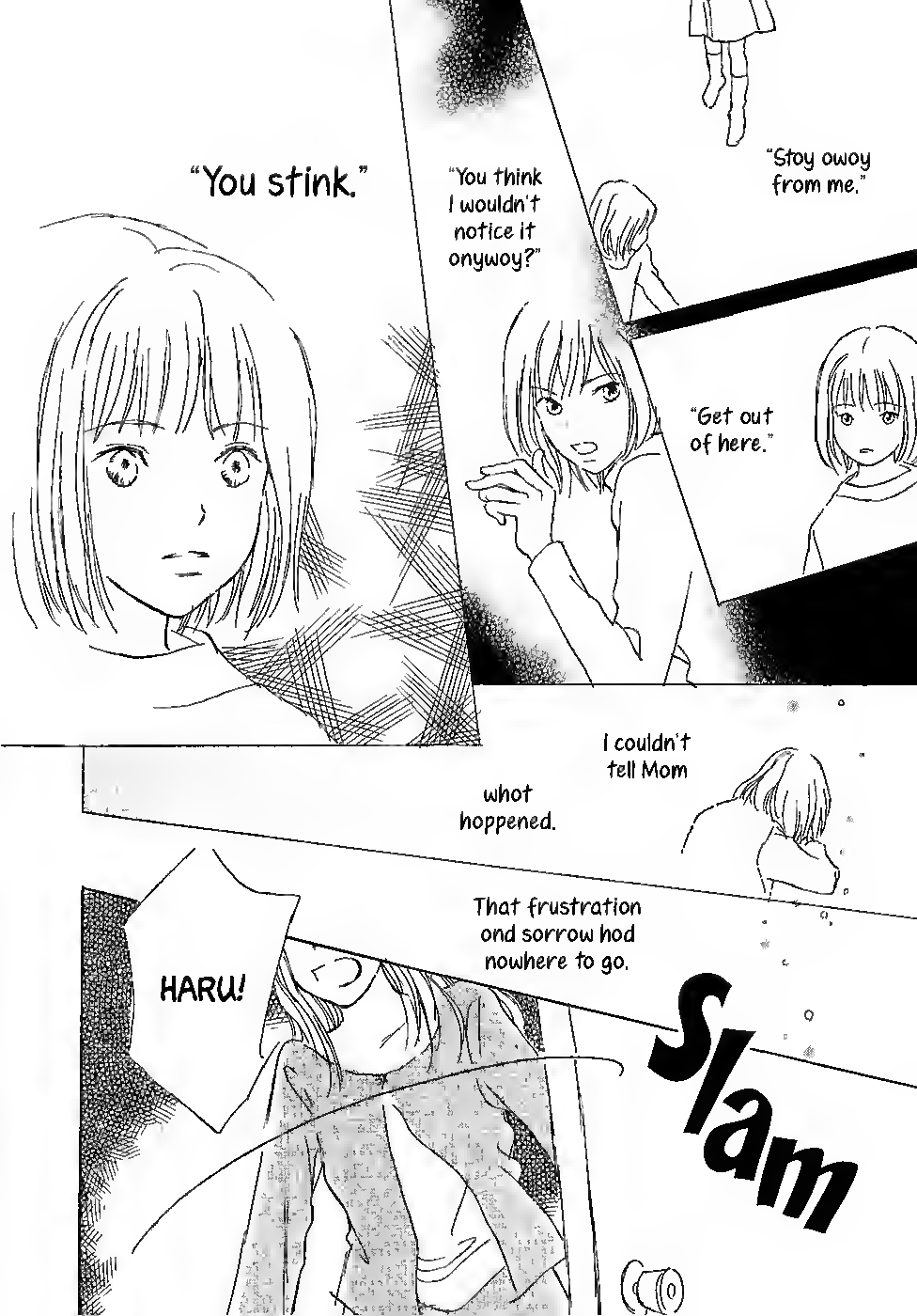
I got my first period at the end of 6th grade.

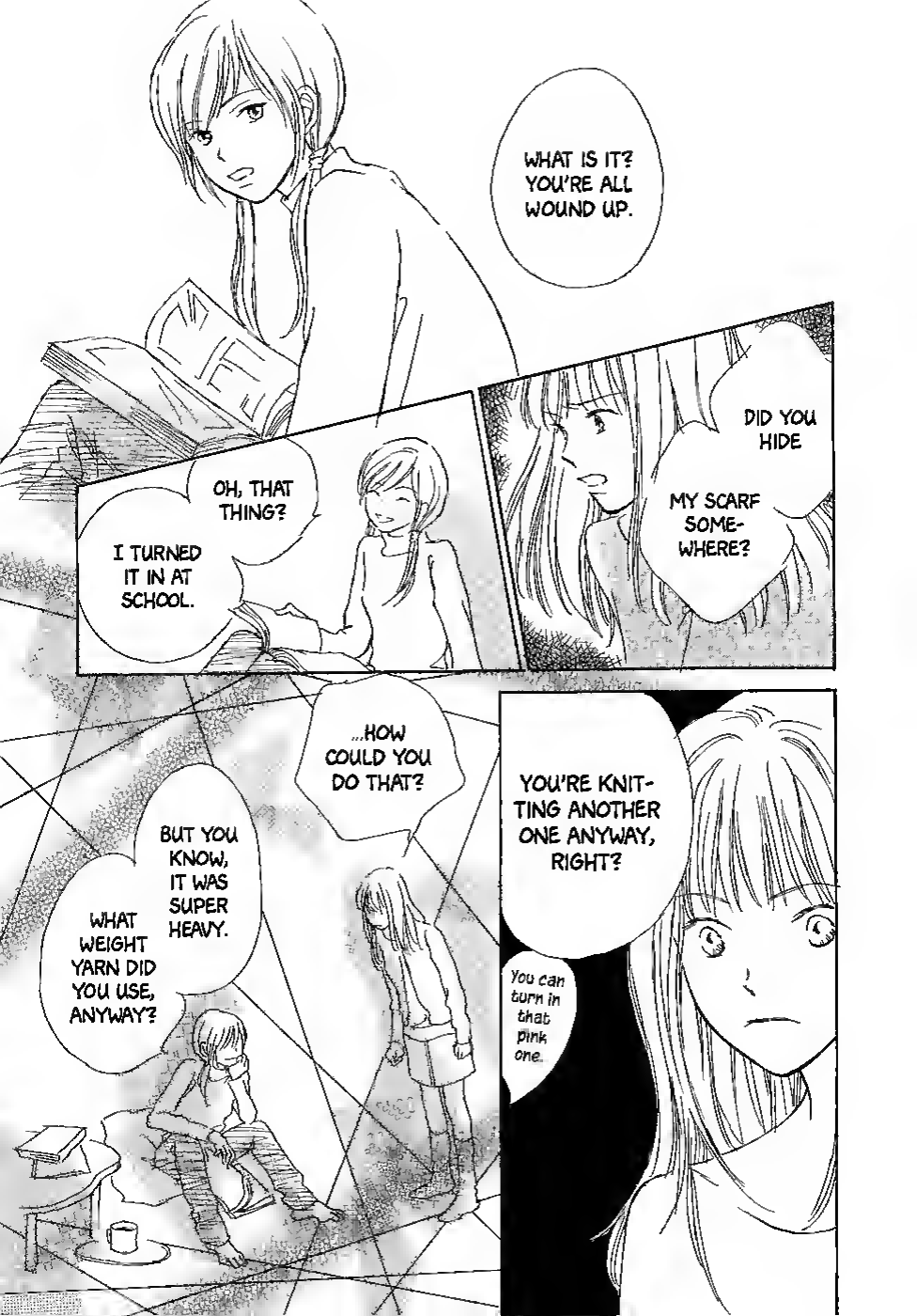
"Dan't, Mam."

"Dan't."

"Haw about I make yaur favarite faad tanight, Mia?"

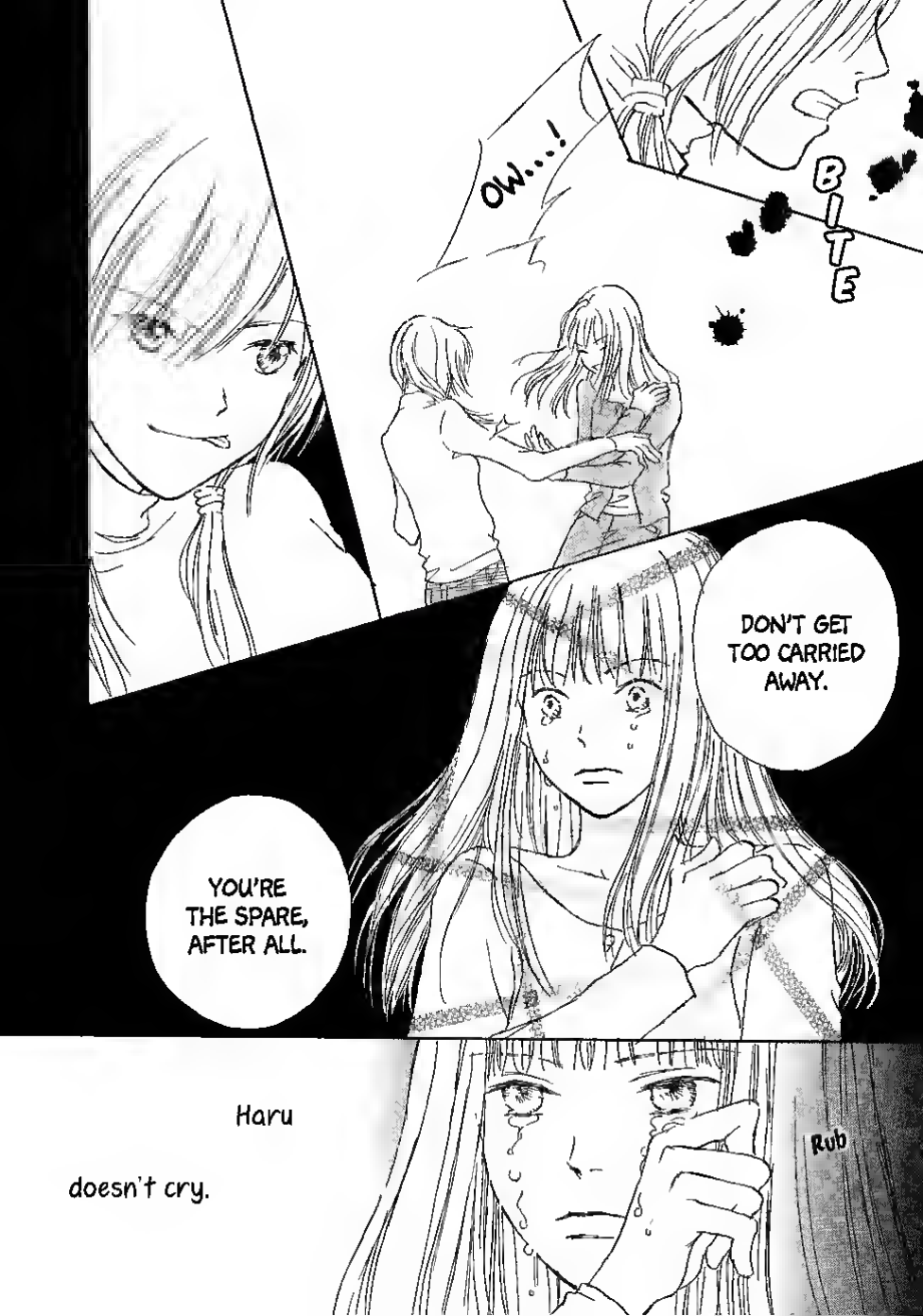
"I dan't want Haru ta knaw."


"You stink."
"You think I wouldn't notice it onywoy?"
"Stoy owoy from me."
"Get out of here."
I couldn't tell Mom whot hoppened.
That frustration ond sorrow hod nowhere to go.
HARU!
Slam


WHAT IS IT? YOU'RE ALL WOUND UP.
DID YOU HIDE MY SCARF SOME-WHERE?
OH, THAT THING?
I TURNED IT IN AT SCHOOL.
YOU'RE KNIT-TING ANOTHER ONE ANYWAY, RIGHT?
You can turn in that pink one.
...HOW COULD YOU DO THAT?
BUT YOU KNOW, IT WAS SUPER HEAVY.
WHAT WEIGHT YARN DID YOU USE, ANYWAY?

PUTTING YOUR HEART INTO IT IS ONE THING,
HA HA HA BUT LAY IT ON TOO THICK AND HE'LL WIND UP WITH SORE SHOULDERS.
Slap
IF YOU GAVE THAT TO HIM, IT'D JUST ANNOY HIM.
YOU'RE UGLY, HARU!
SO UGLY!
I can't.
GOD GAVE YOU THAT BODY
TO MATCH YOUR UGLY HEART.
I can't.
Just that one thing...
HARU...

I WISH YOU WOULD JUST DIE!
OH!
Smile
HARU?

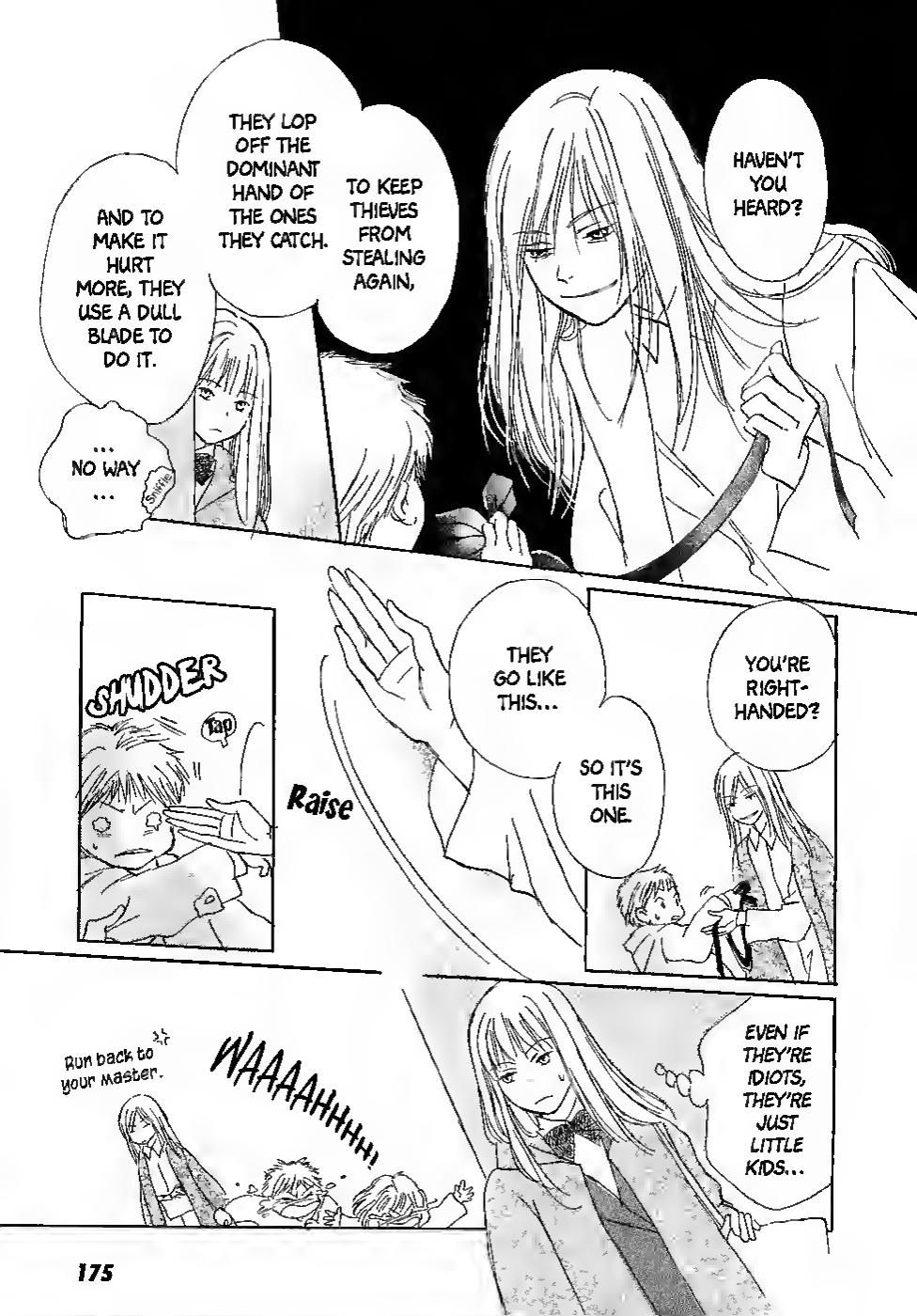

OW...!
BITE
DON'T GET TOO CARRIED AWAY.
YOU'RE THE SPARE, AFTER ALL.
Haru
doesn't cry.
Rub

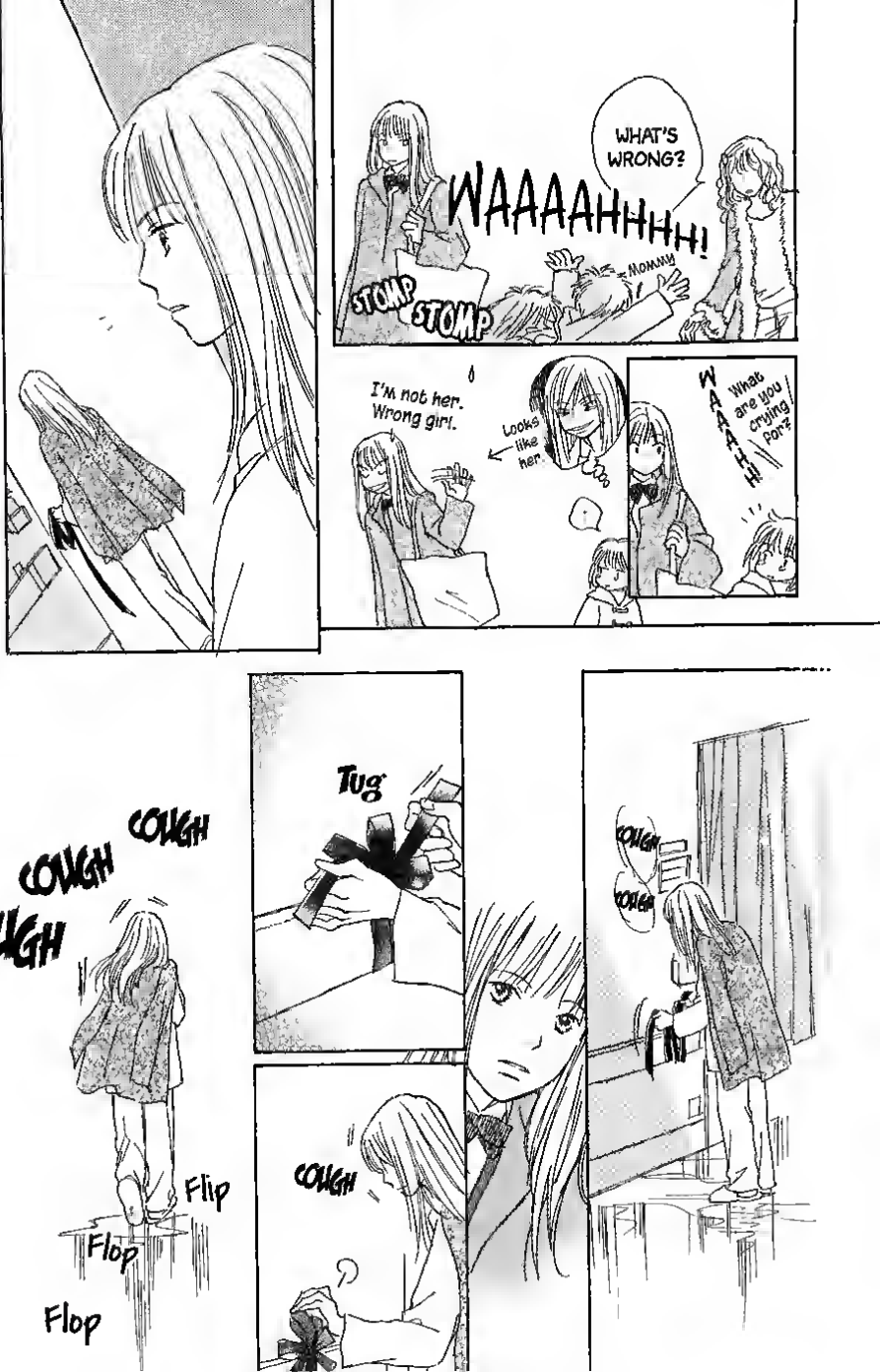
Even when her eyes look transparent as glass,
and fever clouds her visian,
she never cries.
That night
I had a dream.
A vine sprauted
fram where Haru
had bitten me.

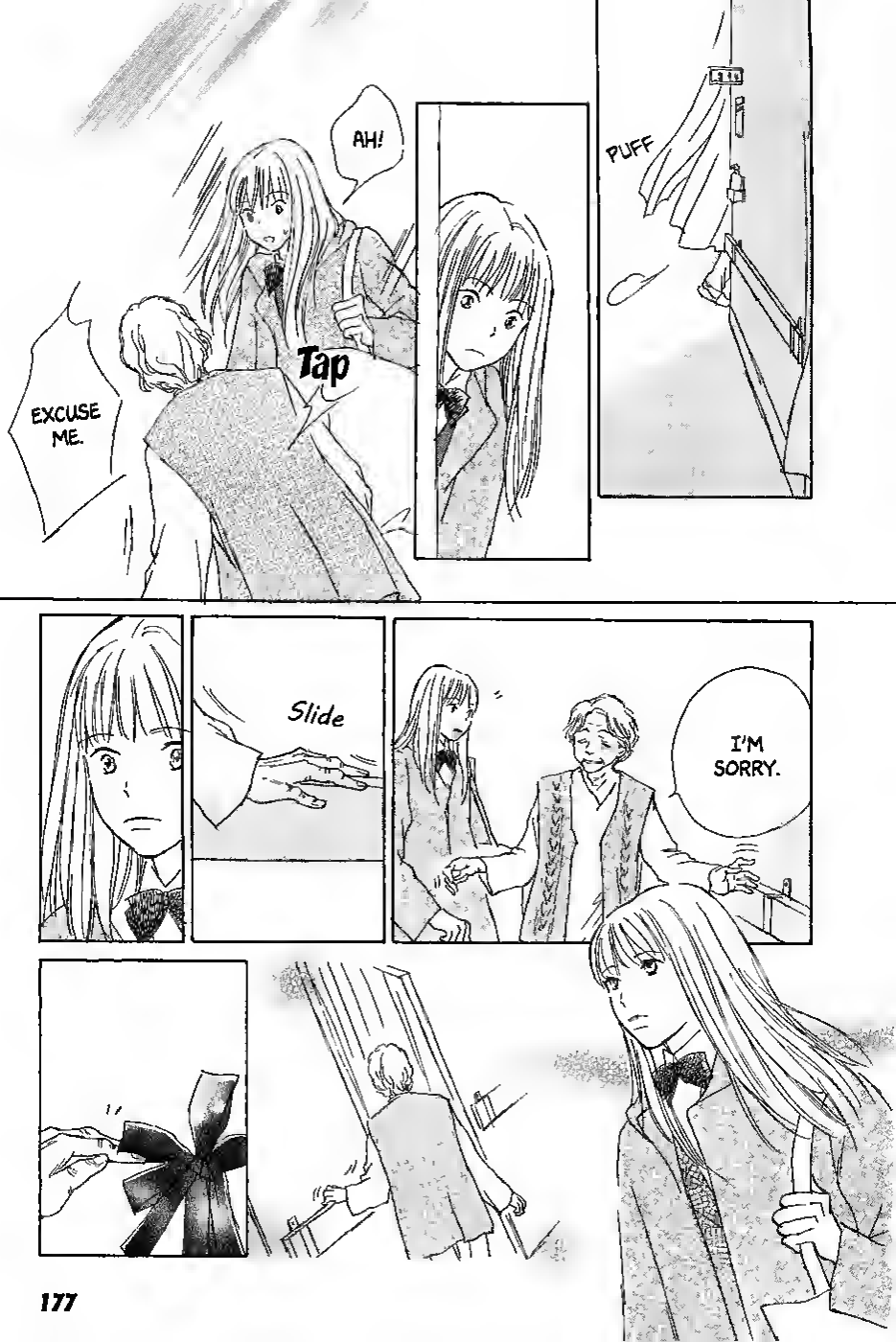
and I tore them off
and stomped on them.
Flowers sprouted down its length,
Stomped and stomped.
MIO.
MIO, WAKE UP.

Far Haru,
Haru wound up in the hospital.
it was normal far even a cald
to knock her out far a manth.
Ding
AHAHAHAHA
THAT'S MIIINE!
STOMP
STOMP
STOMP
STOP!
STOMP
I Pound it First!
STOMP
STOMP
STOMP
STOMP
Don't Fool around in the hospital
STUPID KIDS.

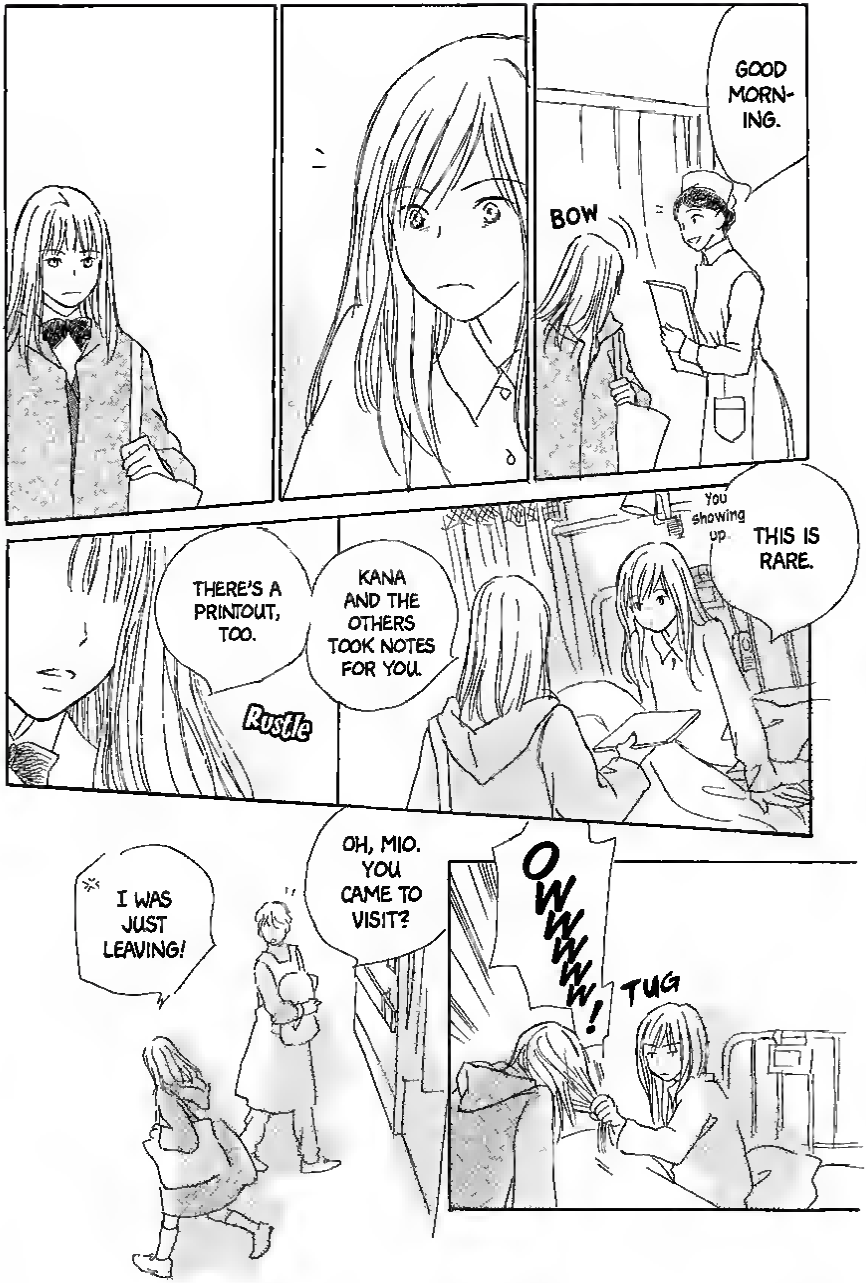
Thud
WAH!
STUPID BROTHER!
STOMP
STOMP
STOMP
OH.
... HMM, SO YOU'RE THE CULPRIT?
GRAB
GIVE THAT TO ME.
AH!
BUT IT'S NOT YOURS EITHER!
Yeah!
SO IT DOESN'T BELONG TO EITHER OF YOU.
NO WAY! I FOUND IT!
NO, IT'S MINE! MINE!


HAVEN'T YOU HEARD?
TO KEEP THIEVES FROM STEALING AGAIN,
THEY LOP OFF THE DOMINANT HAND OF THE ONES THEY CATCH.
AND TO MAKE IT HURT MORE, THEY USE A DULL BLADE TO DO IT.
... NO WAY ...
Shuffle
YOU'RE RIGHT-HANDED?
THEY GO LIKE THIS...
SO IT'S THIS ONE.
Raise
SHUDDER
Tap
EVEN IF THEY'RE IDIOTS, THEY'RE JUST LITTLE KIDS...
Run back to your Master.
WAAAAHHHH!


WHAT'S WRONG?
WAAAAHHHH!
MOMMY
STOMP STOMP
I'm not her. Wrong girl.
Looks like her
What are you crying for?
WAAAAH
Tug
COUGH
COUGH
COUGH
COUGH
COUGH
COUGH
Flip
Flop
Flop

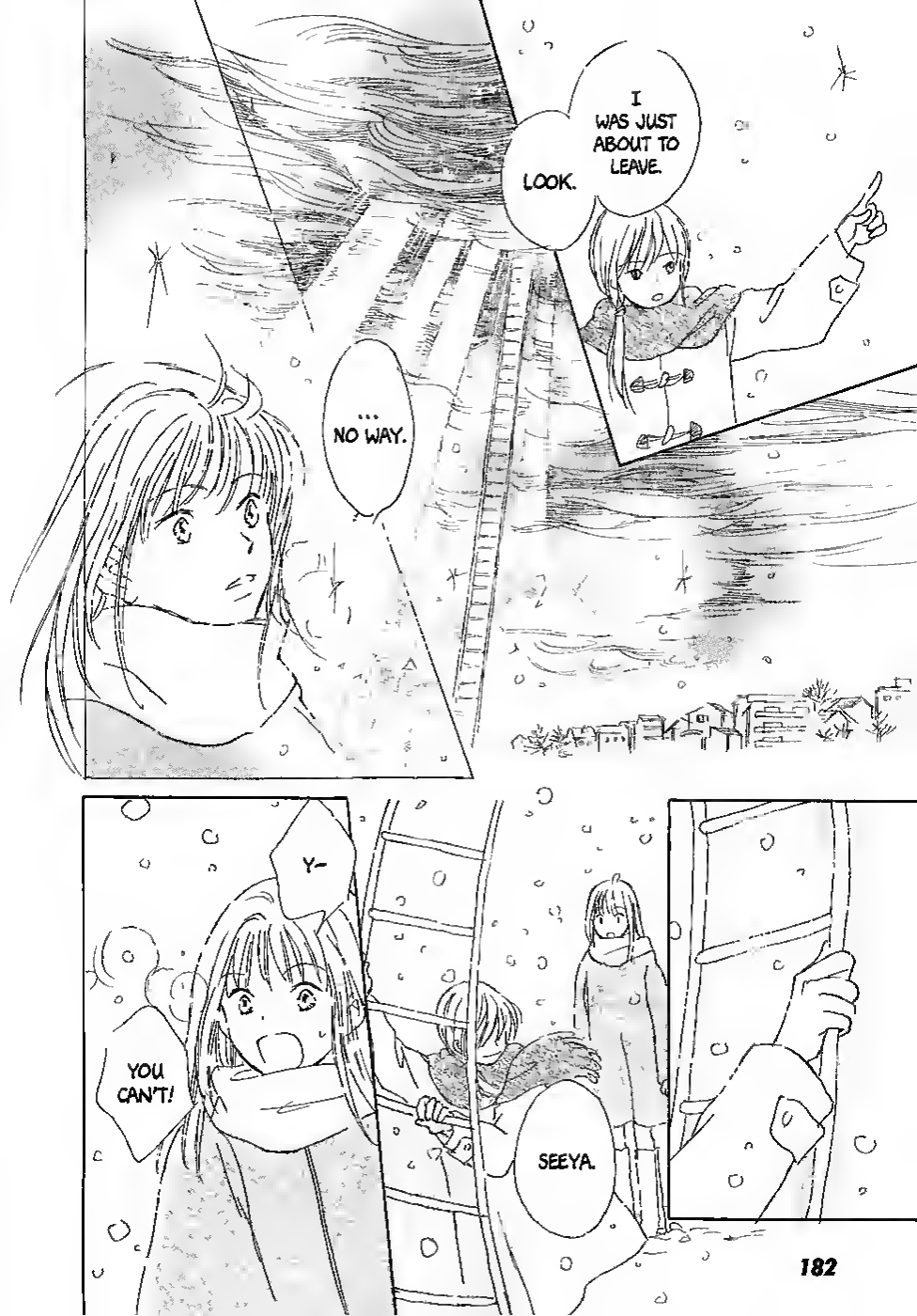

AH!
PUFF
Tap
EXCUSE ME.
Slide
I'M SORRY.

I WANT TO WASH MY HAIR.
YOU MUSTN'T.
COUGH
NO CAN DO.
AT LEAST LET ME DRY IT OFF.
COUGH
COUGH
YOU'LL HAVE TO PUT UP WITH IT UNTIL YOUR FEVER DROPS.
COUGH
COUGH


GOOD MORN-ING.
BOW
THIS IS RARE.
you showing up
KANA AND THE OTHERS TOOK NOTES FOR YOU.
THERE'S A PRINTOUT, TOO.
Rustle
OH, MIO. YOU CAME TO VISIT?
I WAS JUST LEAVING!
OWWWW!
TUG

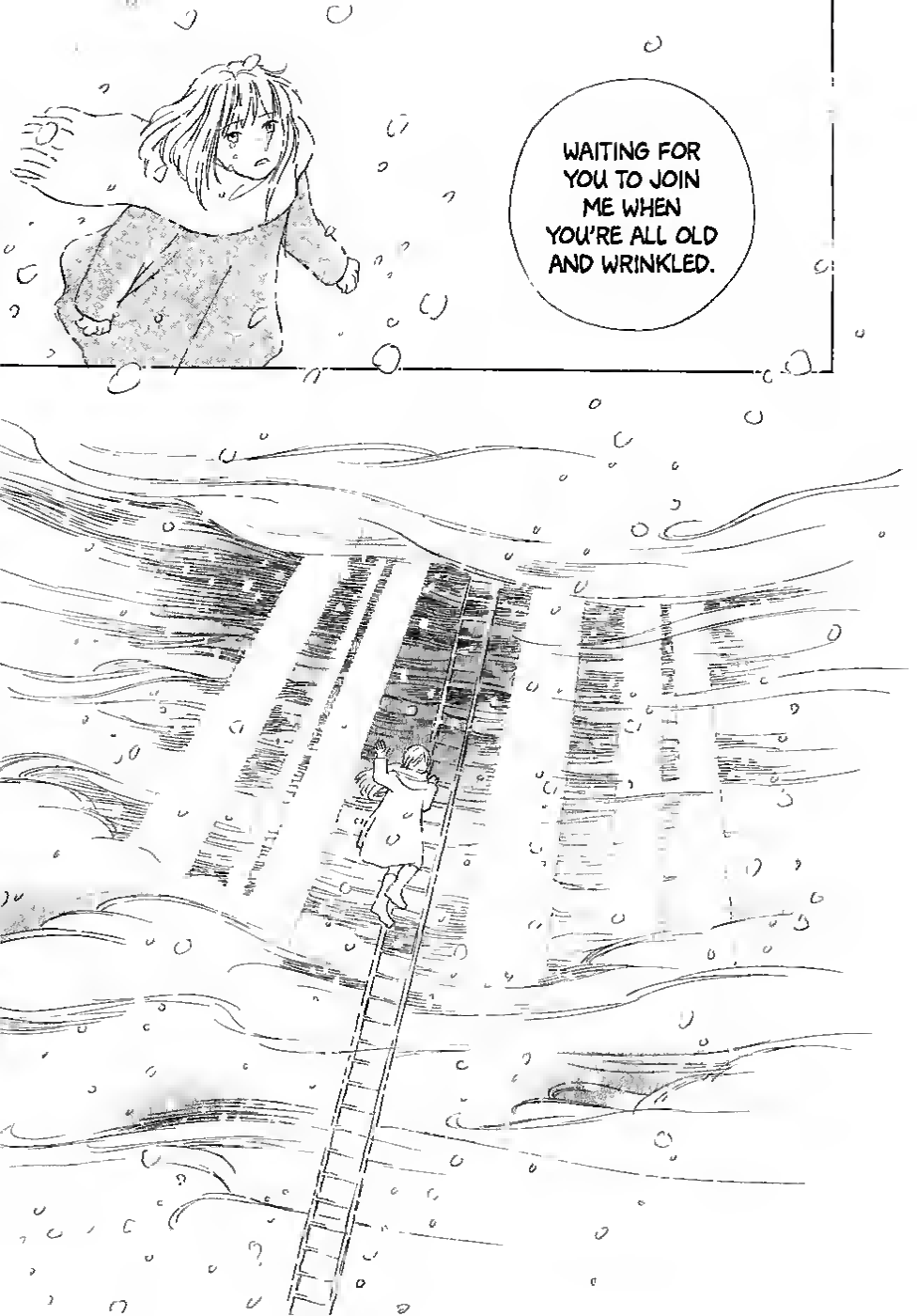
That was the last time
I went ta see Haru at the haspital...
seeya.
Bye.

HARU.
WHAT'RE YOU DOING OUT HERE!?
I'M GOING HOME.
WHY ARE YOU ALWAYS SO SELFISH...
MOM MUST BE WORRIED SICK!
DID YOU SNEAK OUT OF THE HOSPITAL?

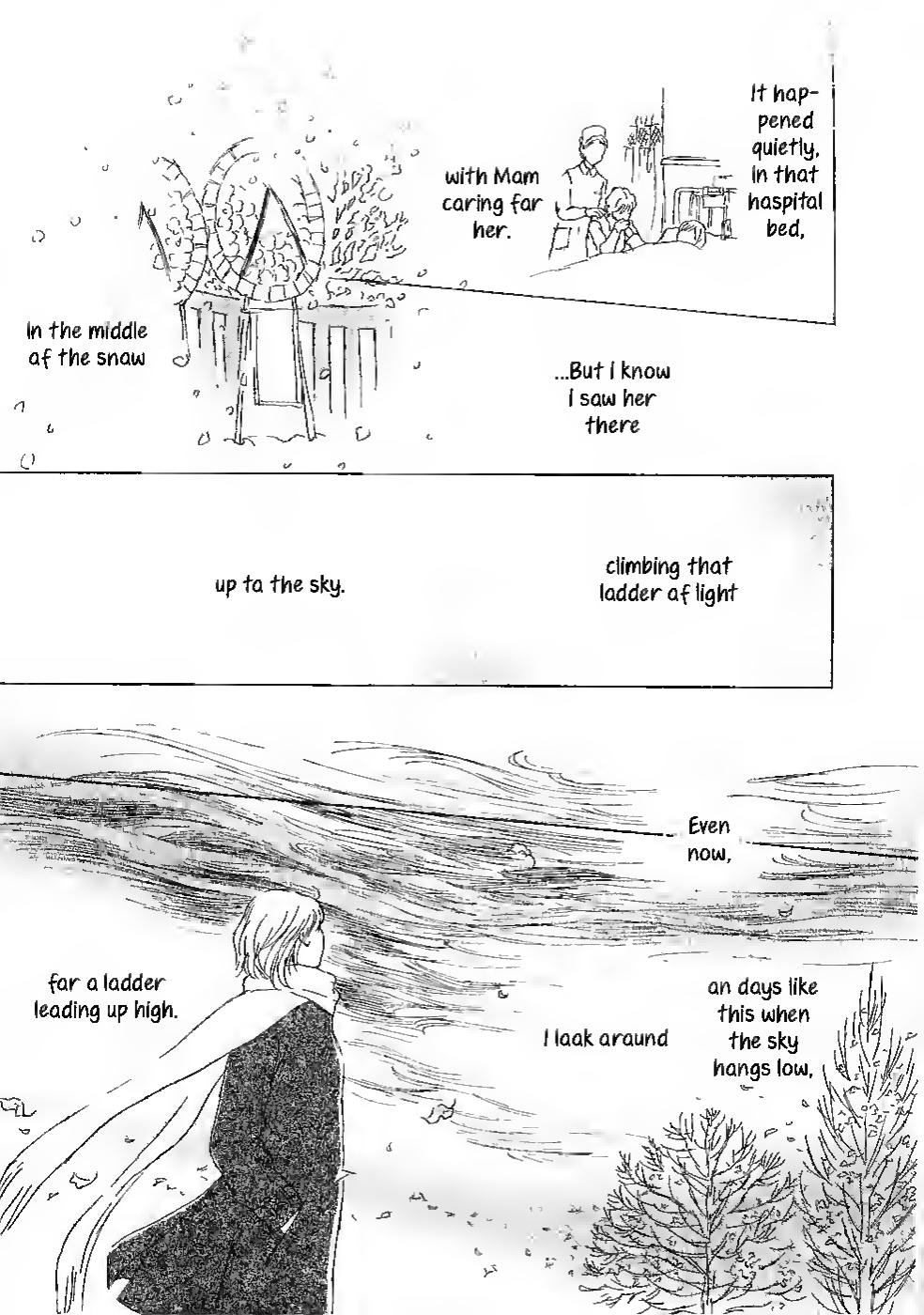

LOOK.
I WAS JUST ABOUT TO LEAVE.
...
NO WAY.
Y-
YOU CAN'T!
SEEYA.

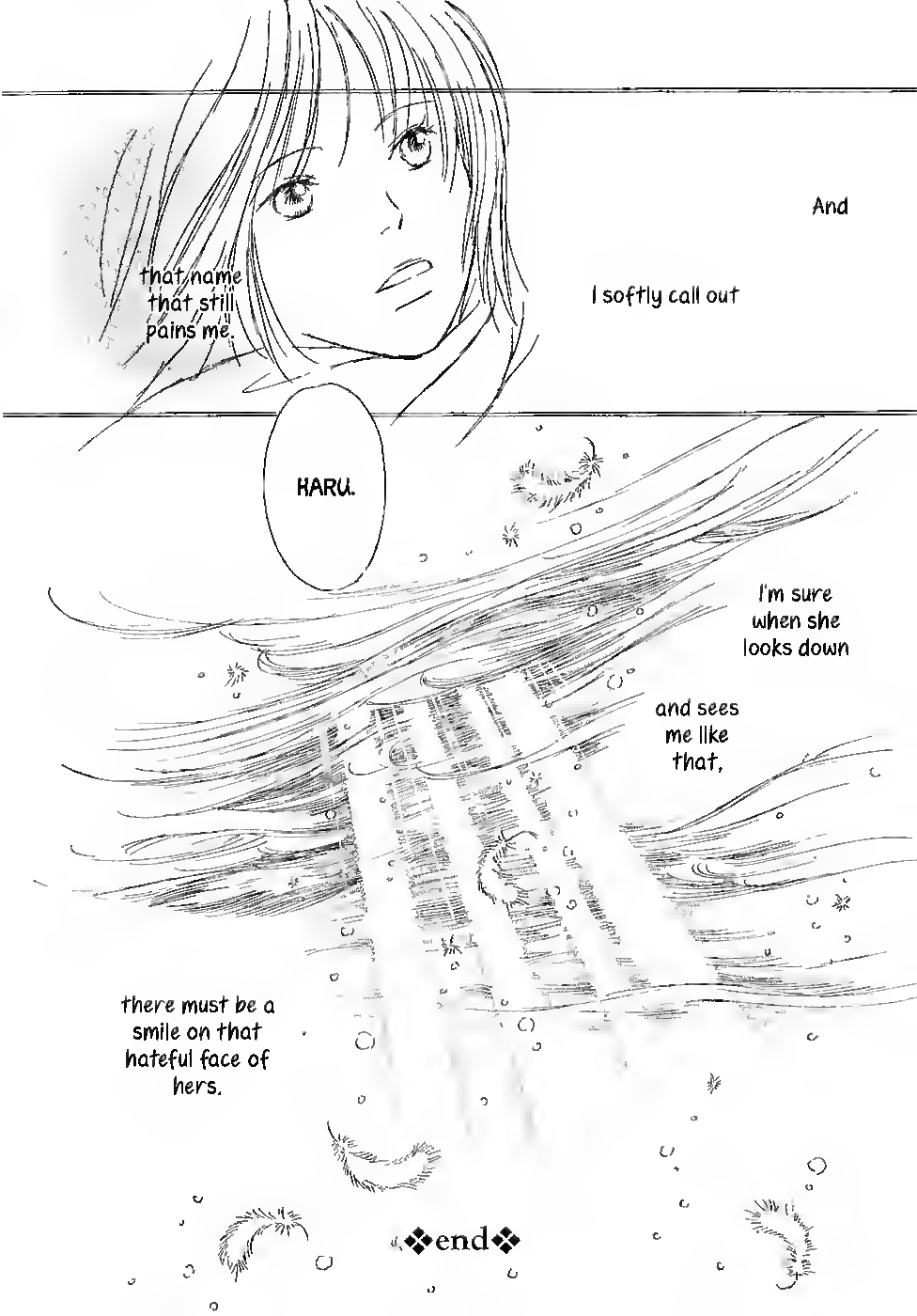
DON'T!
YOU CAN'T! I WON'T LET YOU GO!
HARU!
YOU'RE THE DEVIL!
YOU CAN'T BE AN ANGEL!
NO WAY I'LL LET YOU GO!
I WON'T LET YOU!

YOU IDIOT.
STUPID MIO.
THIS IS THE ONE THING I GET.
TO GO WHILE I'M YOUNG AND PRETTY.
SO I'LL BE UP THERE WAITING.


WAITING FOR YOU TO JOIN ME WHEN YOU'RE ALL OLD AND WRINKLED.

Haru passed away.


It happened quietly, in that haspital bed,
with Mam caring far her.
...But I know I saw her there
In the middle af the snaw
climbing that ladder af light
up ta the sky.
Even now,
an days like this when the sky hangs low,
I laak araund
far a ladder leading up high.


that name that still pains me.
And
I softly call out
HARU.
I'm sure when she looks down
and sees me like that,
there must be a smile on that hateful face of hers.
❖end❖

Summer School

WHAT!?
You guys are too heavy.
I KNEW IT...
TEACHER~ WE'RE NOT MOVING FORWARD AT ALL~~
THAT'S ODD...
Yay!
YOU'RE NOT HUNGRY?
Yay!
DUN
I feel clammy...
It's heavy!
Zzz
Snore
Snore
Zzz
DUN
HURRY UP AND TAKE IT ...
YOU PICKED UP THE CARGO. ♫
Nice job today.
❖end❖

初出

知る辺の道 ―――― スピカ vol 2（2004年1月）
オランジュリー幻想 ―― Webスピカ 2004年12月号
天女 ―――― ミステリービィストリート 2003年10月号
きつねの火 ―――― 同人誌（2001年8月）
匣〜はこ〜 ―――― ミステリービィストリート 2003年8月号
天使のはしご ―――― 別冊あすか vol 1（2002年12月）
Summer School ―――― 描きおろし